

Message Text

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SUBJ: CHALLENGE TO THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP OF COPEI

BEGIN SUMMARY: JUST AS THE RULING ACCION DEMOCRATICA PARTY IN RECENT MONTHS HAS BEEN EXPERIENCING INTERNAL STRAINS AS A RESULT OF INTRA-PARTY MANEUVERING IN ADVANCE OF THE 1978 AD PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, THE PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION PARTY, COPEI, IS LIKEWISE SUFFERING A SERIOUS INTERNAL DIVISION. THE LEADER OF THE COPEI LEFT WING, LUIS HERRERA CAMPINS, IS CHALLENGING THE PARTY'S FOUNDER, RAFAEL CALDERA, OVER THE IMMEDIATE ISSUE OF THE PARTY'S 1978 PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION BUT ALSO FOR ULTIMATE CONTROL OF THE PARTY ITSELF. A CONFRONTATION IS LIKELY AT THE COPEI NATIONAL CONVENTION TO BE HELD THIS AUTUMN. AT PRESENT CALDERA RETAINS CONTROL OF THE BULK OF THE PARTY ORGANIZATION, BUT HERRERA'S BID FOR CONTROL OF COPEI IS SERIOUS AND DETERMINED. UNTIL THE ISSUE IS SETTLED THE COPEI PARTY WILL CONTINUE IN A STATE OF FERMENT. END SUMMARY

1. THE COPEI PARTY WAS STUNNED INTO NEAR-IMMOBILITY FOR ABOUT A YEAR FOLLOWING ITS DEFEAT IN THE DEC 1973 NATIONAL ELECTIONS. ONLY IN RECENT MONTHS, AFTER A PERIOD OF REEVALUATION, HAS THE PARTY BEGUN TO REBUILD AND PREPARE ITSELF FOR THE 1978 ELECTIONS. THIS ACTIVITY IS PRESENTLY DOMINATED BY AN INTRA-PARTY POWER STRUGGLE WHICH WILL DETERMINE THE PARTY'S ORIENTATION FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS AND COULD SPLIT THE PARTY. OSTENSIBLY THE STRUGGLE IS OVER THE KEY PARTY POST OF SECRETARY GENERAL; IN FACT, AT STAKE IS RAFAEL CALDERA'S CONTINUED CONTROL OF COPEI.

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2. CLADERA, NOW 59, HAS DOMINATED COPEI SINCE HE FOUNDED THE PARTY IN 1946. UNABLE TO SUCCEED HIMSELF AS PRESIDENT, CALDERA IMPOSED ON THE PARTY HIS HAND-PICKED CANDIDATE LORENZO FERNANDEZ TO RUN AGAINST ACCION DEMOCRATICA'S CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN 1973. FERNANDEZ WAS STRONGLY OPPOSED FOR THE PARTY NOMINATION BY SENATOR LUIS HERRERA CAMPINS, LONGTIME LEADER OF COPEI'S LEFT WING, WHO CLAIMED AT THE TIME THAT MOST OF THE PARTY PREFERRED HIM OVER FERNANDEZ. HERRERA NEVER CONCEALED HIS CONTEMPT FOR FERNANDEZ AND MADE NO SECRET OF HIS DISGUST WITH CALDERA FOR FOISTING A LOSER UPON THE PARTY.

3. SINCE COPEI'S ELECTORAL DEBACLE OF 1973, HERRERA, NOW 50, HAS BEEN WORKING HARD TO BECOME THE COPEI PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN 1978. HE HAS CAREFULLY COURTED GRASSROOTS COPEI SUPPORT OUTSIDE CARACAS AND HAS BUILT UP A WELL-FINANCED NATIONAL ORGANIZATION. HERRERA HAS GAINED A POWERFUL ALLY IN THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PARTY, SENATOR PEDRO PABLO AGUILAR, AND HAS DECLARED HIMSELF A CANDIDATE FOR THAT KEY PARTY POST, A NEW INCUMBENT OF WHICH WILL BE SELECTED BY THE PARTY'S NATIONAL CONVENTION THIS FALL. HERRERA HAS STRONG SUPPORT FROM MUCH OF THE COPEI YOUTH ORGANIZATION AND FROM A NUMBER OF INFLUENTIAL PARTY CHIEFS, MOSTLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE PARTY'S LEFT WING.

4. CALDERA, WHO WANTS TO CONTINUE TO RUN COPEI AS HIS PERSONAL FIEFDOM, RESENTS WHAT HE REGARDS AS HERRERA'S BRASH AMBITION, DISTRUSTS HIM FOR LACK OF LOYALTY AND FEARS THAT IF HERRERA SUCCEEDS IN CAPTURING THE 1978 COPEI PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, HE, CALDERA, WILL LOSE CONTROL OF THE PARTY, WHICH HE BELIEVES WOULD THEN SWING LEFTWARD. CALDERA IS SUPPORTED BY MOST OF THE COPEI "ESTABLISHMENT," INCLUDING MOST OF THE PARTY'S BEST-KNOWN NAMES. CALDERA IS OPPOSED LARGELY BY THOSE THAT ARE WEARY OF OR IMPATIENT WITH HIS LONG PERSONAL ASCENDANCY OVER THE PARTY.

5. AT THE MOMENT HERRERA'S ONLY DECLARED OPPONENT FOR THE SECRETARY GENERALSHIP IS EX-PUBLIC WORKS MINISTER JOSE CURIEL, ONE OF COPEI'S BEST ORGANIZATION BRAINS, WHO IS ALSO AMBITIOUS FOR THE PRESIDENCY. HOWEVER, CURIEL IS BELIEVED TO BE PREPARED TO STEP ASIDE AT THE LAST MOMENT AT CALDERA'S BEHEST IN FAVOR OF DEPUTY EDUARDO FERNANDEZ, WHO IS THE COPEI WHIP IN THE CHAMBER

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OF DEPUTIES AND, AT AGE 34, WIDELY REGARDED AS THE PARTY'S OUTSTANDING YOUNGER MAN. WHILE FERNANDEZ WOULD PROBABLY BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE PRO-AS WELL AS THE ANTI-HERRERA FORCES AS SECRETARY GENERAL, HE WILL STILL BE TOO YOUNG TO BE A VIABLE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN 1978. AWARE OF THIS, HERRERA IS TRYING HARD TO CONVINCE THE PARTY RANK-AND-FILE THAT BY EXPERIENCE, DRIVE AND ABILITY HE IS THE PARTY'S LOGICAL STANDARD BEARER FOR 1978, AND THAT THE ALTERNATIVE IS OSSIFICATION OF THE PARTY AND

ITS INEVITABLE DEFEAT IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS.

6. THE NEXT TEST OF STRENGTH BETWEEN THE CALDERA AND HERRERA FORCES WILL COME AT THE COPEI NATIONAL CONVENTION, WHICH HAS NOT YET BEEN FORMALLY SCHEDULED BUT WHICH WILL PROBABLY TAKE PLACE NO EARLIER THAN OCT 1975. AT THE PRESENT TIME IT APPEARS THAT CALDERA AND HIS ALLIES ARE STRONG ENOUGH TO DEFEAT HERRERA'S BID FOR THE PARTY'S SECRETARY GENERALSHIP. HOWEVER, HERRERA REGARDS HIMSELF AND HIS CAUSE AS THE PARTY'S FUTURE; HE IS TOUGH AND APPARENTLY PREPARED TO FIGHT TO THE FINISH TO GAIN " HIS TURN" IN THE COPEI PRESIDENTIAL SWEEPSTAKES. UNTIL THE ISSUE BETWEEN CALDERA AND HERRERA IS DECIDED ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, COPEI WILL CONTINUE TO BE RACKED BY INTERNAL FERMENT, THEREBY REDUCING ITS EFFECTIVENESS AS VENEZUELA'S PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION PARTY.

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